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ABSTRACT

This brief describes some of the innovative programs and features at Hopwood Junior High School, the only intermediate school on the island of Saipan in the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands. The Opportunity Learning Center (OLC), an "in school" suspension program, provides students with a closely supervised learning environment, ideally one-on-one. The Model Classroom trains students in the use of educational technology for the study of science. Other unique features of the school include school-day and school-week extensions, a multitrack year-round schedule, incentives for teachers and students, a parent escort program, and a feeling of united purpose. In 1993, one of Hopwood's faculty members received the CNMI Teacher of the Year Award. The school is also changing to a middle school grade configuration, from grades 7 and 8 to grades 6-8. (LMI)

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Hopwood: A Pearl Of A Junior High School In The Pacific

By Stan Koki

Along with *restructuring* and *reform*, *innovation* is now a buzz word in education. But at Hopwood Junior High School in the Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI), educational innovation is a fundamental way of life. In its pursuit of excellence, the school has adopted the motto: "Not to produce more but to produce better."

Established in 1949 as Saipan Intermediate School, and then renamed after Admiral Herbert G. Hopwood, it is the only intermediate school in Saipan. The CNMI forms a chain of 17 volcanic islands, stretching over 375 miles north to south, with a land area of 181 square miles. There are six inhabited islands, but most of the CNMI's 78,753 people live on Saipan.

Within a relatively short period, Hopwood Junior High School has become a trend-setter for educational innovations among schools in the Pacific region. The school's norms include such expressions as, "Pick one thing and try to improve it." "Think big but start small." " Failures are acceptable." " Experimentation is important." " The only way to success is through small failures."

Some of the outstanding teaching and innovative programs and initiatives at Hopwood Junior High School are featured here as a way of recognizing and celebrating the achievements of Pacific educators. The abundance of innovations at the school is testimony of the creativity, energy, and will of Pacific educators to provide quality education to children in the Pacific region.

The Opportunity Learning Center

Intervention is a driving force at Hopwood Junior High School. The Opportunity Learning Center is the result of the school's vision to promote school success for all students. To this end, a critical strategy is the prevention of students dropping out of school. The Opportunity Learning Center (OLC) is an "in-school" option to suspension for students with discipline problems. The school believes that out-of-school suspension interferes with student learning, creates problems for families and the community, and is counterproductive to student achievement.

Situated in Room 14-B, the program can accommodate 10-15 students. Its objective is to provide students with a closely supervised learning environment, ideally one-on-one. Students are placed in the program by the school administration as they are referred to the office by teachers for disciplinary action. The length of time a student spends in the OLC depends on the degree of improvement that the student must demonstrate. While the duration of stay in the program is handled case by case, a minimum of three days is typical.

Students in the OLC participate in academic learning experiences specified by the student's teachers, as well as behavior modification activities to develop self-esteem and confidence. One behavior modification activity is "Getting to Know Yourself." In this activity, the student is asked to fill out a questionnaire. Its aim is to help the students know themselves better. Rather than focusing on the physical aspects of each individual, the form emphasizes understanding of the "inner self." The intent is to help students understand the basis for their emotional outbursts such as anger, as well as to handle

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their emotions more effectively. This activity also assists students assess the degree of likelihood of success to be reformed, and serves as a check and balance of each student's life priorities.

The "mirror-image corner" activity is assigned to build self-esteem. This is an activity in which the student is asked to remain in a specially designed corner of Room 14-B equipped with mirrors. This is where the student can become introspective. The student is first instructed to consider physical aspects of self before focusing on the "inner self" of the mirror's reflection. Students assigned to this corner are then given time alone to think for themselves. On occasion, students are asked to groom themselves so that they can discern the difference between being unkempt and kempt. The belief is, "If they look good, they will surely feel good about themselves, as well!"

Creativity is applied by Hopwood School even for activities such as eating lunch or going to the bathroom. Students in the OLC are allowed to have lunch and use the bathroom as privileges. The granting of basic privileges reminds students that they can be responsible for all of their actions. In addition, they have the responsibility to demonstrate that they can be trusted. Few students have abused these privileges.

Students involved in conflicts, such as fights and arguments with fellow students, are provided with one-on-one counseling, during which they are encouraged to vent feelings of anger. They are asked to write, or draw on a piece of paper their thoughts and feelings, and are then given "words of wisdom/ food for thoughts" that assist them in understanding their situation, or come up with appropriate solutions to their problems. During these counseling sessions, students are also taught relaxation techniques, such as visualization, diaphragmatic breathing, progressive muscle relaxation (PMR), coordinating breathing with PMR, practice breathing and PMR, and autogenic training exercises (heaviness exercise).

The success of the program is reflected in a steady decline in the school's dropout rate since the program was implemented. By the end of school year 1991-1992, the dropout rate was 15.77 percent. For school year 1992-1993 it was 11.44 percent. At the end of school year 1993-1994, the rate was 10.97 percent.

The Model Classroom

A recent innovation at Hopwood is the Model Classroom, housing Mrs. Venus Pineda's science classes. The purpose of the model classroom is to train students to use educational technology for the study of science. The Model Classroom is equipped with the latest computer equipment, Apple speakers, a personal writer/ printer, a Pioneer laser disc player, a 25-inch color television, a multimedia Supro desk, and an overhead projector and projection screen. These technological tools provide opportunities to expand instructional activities in the classroom, and make learning for students more interesting and relevant.

"The Model Classroom demands a lot from the teacher because of all the preparations involved," states Mrs. Pineda, "but it definitely improves student learning in the classroom."

A $25,000 educational grant greatly assisted the development of this innovative classroom model. The school intends to introduce the model to other classrooms as resources become available.

Extensions of the School Day and Week

In what could become a trend in schools in the CNMI, Hopwood is implementing an after-school program to assist students, especially those at greatest risk of school failure, experience school success.

A Homework Center has provided after-school tutorial services to students during the past four years. The Homework Center devotes an additional two hours of tutorial instruction to students in need of help in English, mathematics, science, and social studies.

A unique feature of the Homework Center is the use of students as tutors. This opportunity for students to tutor other students develops motivation, leadership and enhanced learning for the tutors and encourages bonding of the more successful students with those students experiencing learning difficulties. Services are provided four days a week, Monday through Thursday, 2 - 4 p.m., after regular school hours.

In addition to extending the school day for students, Hopwood is extending the school week to include Saturday through a new initiative, the Family Recharge-Revival Project. The objective of the program is to provide students and their parents quality time to spend together. Activities are designed for parents and their children to share their thoughts and feelings.

"These activities are not necessarily noteworthy," states Dr. Lulu Javier, project coordinator, "but they are, for sure, pleasurable!"

The program taps community leaders who are invited to speak to participants in the program. These community leaders serve as role models. The involvement of community leaders has gained many new supporters for the school.

Year-Round Education

Hopwood has been implementing single-track year-round education. The single-track system is now shifting to multi-track year-round education. The school has rescheduled the school year from 9 to 12 months. While the total number of school days (180) and vacation days (about 2-1/2 months) remains the same as in the September to June school year, in year-round education, both school days and vacation time are spread out over 12 months.

The multi-track model at Hopwood uses a tracking system that divides students equally into four tracks (or groups). At any given time, 75 percent of the students attend school, while the remaining 25 percent are on vacation. The model makes it possible for students and teachers on the same track to be in school and on vacation at the same time.

"Right now, people can't say for sure if year-round education is good or bad," says Mary Manglona, member of the Hilitai News staff. "From my point of view, year-round education can be good because we can have a one-week intercession or vacation after every report card day for four quarters. During intercessions, valuable lessons will be taught at school not only for the students, but also the teachers and staff at Hopwood. So, aside from just sticking to the six courses we are taught every day, we'll have a chance to learn other new things, such as fishing and good grooming, without really forgetting about the other important lessons we have learned."

Incentive Programs

Hopwood School has successfully developed an extensive incentive program designed to recognize and reward students and staff for their outstanding achievements. Because it believes in the value of recognition, the school coordinates a series of rewards for various accomplishments to enhance confidence and self-esteem, and to improve school climate and pride.

Best Class Attendance is an award given each week to a homeroom class that has the best attendance record during a given week. The prize is either pints of ice cream, or cases of Hi-C drinks shared by the members of the homeroom class. Quarterly Best Class Attendance is an award given to a homeroom class that attains the highest attendance record in a given quarter. The homeroom class is awarded a free luncheon at a local restaurant.

Honor Awards Recognition certificates are given to students who receive either all A grades or an A-B average for a whole quarter.

Hilitai Day Departmental Competition is a quarterly activity that involves departmental competitions in which students engage in friendly competition. Prizes are awarded to each department based on its ranking at the conclusion of the competitions. Report Card Day Parents Attendance is a quarterly competition involving parents. The homeroom class with the most parents attending Report Card Day earns a luncheon at the Grand Hotel.

Adviser of the Year is awarded to the teacher who coordinates one or more students clubs or organizations. The recipient of this award must participate in all school extracurricular activities, must be successful in building high self-esteem and leadership qualities in students, and must promote high student achievement. The prize is an off island Fly In Advisers Conference.

These are a few of the many ways in which Hopwood School provides recognition to promote a positive learning environment and pride in the school.

Parent Escort Program

Parents are made to become partners with the school in promoting student achievement. In the Parent Escort Program, parents are required to supervise their children in school and be with them during all their assigned classes. Through this experience, parents get to understand their children better and become more perceptive of how to help their children improve school performance. The visibility of parents in classrooms and at the school contributes to the positive climate, as parents escort their children from class to class.

Middle School

Planning has been initiated for Hopwood School to become a middle school in the very near future. The Saipan Public School System is encouraging replacing the current junior high school structure with grades 7-8 to a middle school concept consisting of grades 6-8. This move will help alleviate the overcrowding problem at the primary grades in Saipan.

Hopwood staff agree that a middle school should exist for the purpose of being developmentally responsive to the special needs of their early adolescent learners. Meeting their needs requires a special curriculum that features content that connects with the everyday lives of students, as well as instruction that actively involves them in the learning process. Through the development of a variety of different programs and organizational patterns, such as interdisciplinary teaming, teacher advisories, student activities, career education, youth service, and others, the school hopes to make Hopwood the premier middle school in the CNMI, and it is well on its way to getting there.

"I like Hopwood Junior High School because of the diversity of people, the many programs it es-

tablishes, the way students are taught, and it's the only junior high school in the CNMI that has been very active. Hopwood stands out!" says Hopwood student Roma King. Other students echo similar sentiments.

Teachers with Passion for Excellence

"I like Hopwood Junior High School because all my teachers teach very well," enthuses Karen C. Duenas. And, indeed, the school has acquired a reputation for teacher excellence. In 1993 Hopwood English teacher Mr. Ernesto O. Alano was adjudged as the CNMI Teacher of the Year, besting 18 other teachers from Rota, Tinian, and Saipan. He was chosen by a six-man panel of judges which reviewed each nominee's performance as a teacher.

In Hopwood, Alano spearheaded such innovations as the inclusion of journalism in the school's curriculum in 1988. This paved the way for the establishment of the school's quarterly publication Hilitai News. Other innovations initiated by Alano are three volumes of The Book of Poems containing student poetry and art work, and Hilitai Jokes: A Stress Management Approach published in January 1994.

In Alano's class, students pay attention. They know every minute of class is going to be used by their energetic teacher. "When we come inside his class, we can't talk to our friends," says Jocelyn Aldan. "We just have to sit down and wait for instruction. He wants to make us learn more. He's strict but he teaches good."

Alano's students are not the only ones who appreciate his work. He was also nominated for the Bagong Bayani award for best Filipino overseas worker worldwide.

Mr. Charles McAlister, a seventh grade social studies teacher, was selected as Hopwood's Teacher of the Year nominee for the school year 1994-1995. He joined Hopwood four years ago and "have never regretted my decision to become a teacher. As each year passes, I feel I have more to contribute. I have tried my best to have a positive impact on my students and to make a difference," he states.

Like other teachers at Hopwood, McAlister is also actively involved in school activities. During his stay at the school, he has served as the chief advisor of the Student Council Organization, chairperson of the Faculty Council of the National Junior Honor Society, and coach of the Hopwood Athletic Club.

Singleness of Purpose

Abundance of good teaching and innovative programs at Hopwood Junior High School results from the school's singular purpose, believes Angelita Buniag, Master Teacher.

"Bring the best out of the best. We make every day the best. We aim for excellence," she remarks. "Our innovations were fathered by our boss, Mr. Pangelinan. He has inspired us to work as a team at our school. Mr. Pangelinan recognizes teachers' achievements in many ways. He can even motivate 'dormant' teachers and make them shine!"

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